EUROPE IN SEARCH OF EUROPEANS :

THE ROAD TO MYTHS AND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a plea in favor of the EU. Yet, it is also critical of some choices it has made in the past, choices that now hinder its development. I seek to demonstrate that the EU needs a more substantial symbolic foundation, regardless of its more or less centralized configuration. I assume that any form of social link must rely on some shared basic symbolic assets.

A first part recalls the founding cultural choices that have allowed the EU to take shape and to enjoy a rapid development. The second part proceeds to show how the same choices can be linked to the major predicaments that are plaguing the EU today, mainly because they have not been revised and adapted to the changing conjunctures. The analysis then goes on to review the unsuccessful subsequent attempts made by the EU over the past decades to develop new myths and a European identity.

I contend that a particularly unfortunate cultural choice made by the EU was to distrust and sidestep the nations (as configurations of culture, not to be confused with the states), and to opt for a top-down process of governance. In order to break this pattern, I suggest that the EU will have to find a way to mend fences with the nations in order to i) put an end to a long-standing detrimental tension, ii) harness rather than stifle the nations' still substantial symbolic resources and energy, and iii) secure a platform to build new European myths. Examples of a new way to build the future myths are offered, essentially through what I call a europeanization of national myths. The overall goal is to carve myths that would resonate both at the continental and national levels. In other words : to invent a true European voice with various national echoes.

KEY WORDS

Failed European identity and myths-building;

Symbolic foundation;

Reconciling the EU with nations;

New European myths.

I
THE CONCEPT OF SYMBOLIC FOUNDATION

The notion of symbolic foundation is rooted in a neo-durkheimian tradition. It echoes the importance that the French sociologist attached to the layer of shared symbols that at once a) underpin the life of any collectivity and b) emerge from it. From a modern perspective, what is involved here is a common language and a set of beliefs, values, ideals, norms, narratives and worldviews usually coalescing into myths, identity and "repertoires"[1]. In every society, the symbolic foundation is conveyed and perpetuated through rituals by institutions and other social actors across social divisions. In short, it is the realm of deepest meanings, emotions and sacredness (religious or not) that fosters solidarity and supports institutions. From one society to another, it can be more or less substantial, consistent, and forcefully inculcated. But as a rule, it stands to reason that the more closely integrated a collectivity wishes to be, the more substantial a symbolic foundation is needed for the sake of unity, cooperation, and shared future.

Societies devoid of such a symbolic platform are more at risk of lapsing into various forms of powerlessness and stagnation, as a result of their inability to build consensus and to mobilize around common goals. All social sciences, in various ways and extents, rely on this assumption. An old research tradition shows that this holds for the micro-social level as well. There is a wide theoretical agreement among psychologists that any social relation needs to rely on some form of symbolic underpinning.

Two additional, complementary concepts are needed : myth and identity.

Myth

Myth will be primarily defined as a sacralized value, emotionally grounded, part of a seven-fold configuration[2] :

1- A linkage to the deep layer of archetypes.
2- Interventions of social actors. To a large extent, the emergence of a social myth requires the contribution of collective actors (political parties, institutions, media, lobbying groups, associations, trade unions, social movements…) who find an interest in promoting the message it conveys in order to advance their agenda. In doing so, they activate what could have been hitherto a dormant archetype.
3- Narrative. Myths are essentially collective representations carrying sacralized values and beliefs, but most of the times, they also feed on a vision of the past. Usually, it is rooted in a particularly significant event or experience (an « anchor »), source of a powerful emotion (an « imprint ») that is translated into values and norms (an "ethos"). So, a myth is not a narrative but it needs it to bolster itself.
4- Discursive strategies (including visual, iconic supports). They aim to promote the myth by way of various rhetoric devices –framing being the most common.
5- Sacralization. The mythification process is driven by emotion more than by reason. Thanks to what I call a cognitive shift, the values and ideals conveyed by the message get immersed in sacredness). This is the most defining attribute of a myth which, this way, is able to largely escape criticism and to endure despite its contradictions, distortions and lies. National myths are the most familiar embodiment of this attribute.
6- Symbols. As identifiers and boosters of values and ideals, symbols are a critical part of the apparatus designed to disseminate and to support myths.
7- Contextualization. The message must closely connect with the deep sources of anxiety, challenges and dreams of a population at any given time. Then, it can be seen as a way out of a predicament, as a road to fulfilment and happiness.

A myth can be just an attempt to manipulate, to alienate minds. More generally, it can be sometimes beneficial and sometimes detrimental. But its defining attribute lies elsewhere : as a universal sociological mechanism active in all societies --modern as well as « primitive »-- myths have the power to sacralize a collective representation. Thanks to this attribute, myths have a capacity to unleash collective energy and to mobilize a population into pursuing common goals, although societies can also produce myths that contradict themselves and breed inhibition and stagnation.

In itself, a social myth provides meanings, instill psychological security and confers some stability on a society. But it also grounds an ethos and, through ideologies, points to a direction for action. In that sense, it is a wager on the future (to achieve race equality, to suppress the gender gap, to promote freedom and democracy…)[3].

Identity

A second concept associated with the notion of symbolic foundation is identity, construed in accordance with what has become the prevailing view nowadays in social sciences in the wake of Barth (1969) and many others, that is : a dialogically constructed, often mythified representation of a collective or individual self feeding on i) more or less arbitrary self-ascribed characteristics and ii) a sense of distinctiveness strenghtened by a reference to an otherness. That way, identities set off an inclusion/exclusion mechanism, they foster a sense of belonging and solidarity, and they create symbolic boundaries. It has also been shown that they are often based on distortions, they can be multiple and contradictory and they constantly change. That said, once they are deeply internalized in a group or a population, they can be lived as consistent and stable, as warm truths about oneself rather than cold, arbitrary constructs.

Myths and identities are closely linked, but they should not be confused. Myths are meant to instill an ethos, a sense of duties that are expected to translate into individual or collective behaviors. By contrast, identities in and of themselves are a source of belonging, solidarity and boundaries that fuel the inclusion/exclusion mechanism, but they do not convey specific goals or directions for action. In that sense, one could say that identities are an emotional force without a program.

From the foregoing, one can measure the challenge involved in the voluntary and rationally-driven creation of a new, large scale collective entity such as the EU, arguably an unprecedented endeavour. To that end, as we will see, the EU leaders have tried to build a symbolic foundation for the projected body, which raises two questions that will propel this analysis : i) how did they proceed? and ii) did they succeed?

II
THE FOUNDING CHOICES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION REVISITED

The pionneers of the EU were in the majority Christian-democrats pursuing the Gospel ideal of conciliation, mutual help, unity and peace[4]. Together, they made critical choices and assumptions that have significantly weighed on the future of the EU and are still influential today in various ways. I do not assume that they were shared by all founders but they constituted the dominant view among them and their successors. Here is a brief outline of the major features.

Founding choices

1- The two world wars (soon to be joined by the Shoah) were the ultimate disgrace, a brutal violation of the European humanist tradition. This powerful reference fed the powerful nascent myths promoting peace, harmony and cooperation ("Never again").
2- Because of the disastrous display of nationalisms (or ultra-nationalisms) and atrocities during the first decades of the century, nations and popular classes had to be distrusted and kept at bay. The new Europe would be built by enlightened elites away from and, if necessary, against the nations.
3- States and their political processes had failed; they had to be disciplined. As for traditional parliamentary democracy, easily subverted by populism, it had proved unreliable and it had to be kept in check.
4- There was not much doubt that the people (the "populace"), although kept away from the leadership of the new great venture, would trust and follow their elites, as they usually did in exceptional times.
5- Giving priority to the economy (to the « functional » and material interest over the "symbolic") appeared to be the surest way to come out of the after-War mess. Prosperity would trump everything else[5] and, in the long term, it would overcome the resistance inspired by the nations' short-sighted and dangerous views. As a consequence, the cultural and the irrational –or more specifically : national cultures-- should be treated with suspicion ("economy unites, culture divides").
6- According to an influential view, the post-WWII years were witnessing the birth of a new world calling for the end of the Wesphalian era. In the minds of many founders, the Nation-states had no future. There was a unique opportunity to pursue a great utopia that would change for the best the fate of Europe. The time was ripe for a supra-national, centralized authority destined to take over the old dysfunctional national political framework.
7- Europe had to be transformed but it did not have to be rebuilt from scratch. It already existed through its unique, brilliant distinctive past and civilization. What was needed was an awakening, a return to its roots, to its true nature, a rediscovery of its superior values.

8- In their state of devastation and weakness, European societies had to be protected against three big threats : i) a quick recovery of Germany and a return to its dominating and destructive dreams, ii) the American economic imperialism, iii) the agressively expansionist USSR[6].

Some of these choices were assumptions and admonitions, other were elements of a worldview or ideological orientations. Together, they represent the symbolic foundation of the EU at its birth. Interestingly, some contradictions come to light. Despite the firm commitment of the founders to reason and functionality, several choices were authentic myths or had the potential to evolve into full-fledged myths as defined above. This was the case with values and views such as respect for human life, peace, prosperity, cooperation, rule of law, rationality, pragmatism, the belief in a supra-national order, and the nation as a foil.

I do not contend that these founding choices by themselves drove the birth and growth of the Union, but at least they helped in creating the cultural background conducive to the critical initial steps, along with other factors[7]. They were also influential in shaping the governance model and future policies.

One can see here the contents of the EU symbolic foundation at the outset. So, somewhat unexpectedly, myths actually played a significant role at that time. However, for several decades, the leaders appeared strangely unconcerned by this dimension of their project.

A critical view

In the aftermath of the WWII, these choices instantly or progressively enjoyed a strong support among the elites, especially those at the forefront of the European project. Indeed, the founding choices looked particularly appropriate in the post-war context. Over the years, however, these choices would either lose their grips or hinder the development of the EU. Actually, a close linkage[8] can be made between each of the founding choices and the predicaments that are now facing the Union. Let's consider this :

1- Over the long run, building on the atrocities of the wars and other crimes perpetrated before by European countries (through colonialism, slavery, totalitarianism, fascism, genocides…) instilled a sense of guilt and shame that is now somewhat counter-productive. It stifles the feelings of pride, confidence and excitement of which the future of EU is now badly in need. It also undermines attempts to use the past as a source of self-esteem, as most collectivities do (or try to do). Besides, as the actors and witnesses of the war disappear, its tragic memory is fading, specially among the youth, even in Germany where the memory of this dark time does not resonate as it used to do in the political and historical discourse. As a result, the present young generation may cast a colder gaze at the future of the Union[9].

2- The distrust of nations (not to be confused with the states), nationalisms and of the democratic process contributed to the adoption of a top-down approach to the European project and ultimately to the democratic deficit that is widely deplored nowadays. It was understood that the elites, working against the perceived obscurantism and untrustworthy moods of the popular classes, had a duty to reconnect with the great European humanist tradition (specially the Enlightenment) and its lofty goals, which were beyond the reach of ordinary people. In doing so, the leaders were also creating a legitimacy issue that still endures.

3- The priority granted to economy added to this undemocratic bent by emphasizing the role of experts (the infamous Brussells "technocrats"). Resorting to the neo-functionalist model with its spill-over mechanism ("pragmatic incrementalism") was a congruent move with the prioritizing of economy. But relying primarily on material profit and sidestepping culture to drive the construction of the Union was a risky choice : what would happen if (as is presently the case) the economy falters? Would the euro, as an identity staple, be powerful enough to generate solidarity and to preserve unity over the long haul? More generally, the EU might be left with not enough substantial symbolic asset to help alleviate and overcome its old and recent predicaments.

4- Contrary to what had been expected, the people did not really follow their elites. As revealed by various measures of popular support and identification to the Union, a majority of Europeans remain distant and, in some instances, have expressed a clear discontent with the European project. So, to some extent, the distrust is now mutual.

5- It is now obvious that rationality and economic progress have not suppressed "irrational obstacles", specially national myths and identities. Moreover, the outright rejection of the irrational has left the EU ill-prepared to redress its course. Most attempts to build a European symbolic foundation now must confront a difficult challenge, having to compete with well-entrenched national cultures that have enjoyed a quasi-monopoly in the sphere of myths, memory, identity and traditions (more about that below).

6- The Wesphalian order has been weakened but states have survived by redefining themselves, specially as guardians of the people against supra-national forces, including the EU. As a result, the management of the relationship between

Brussells and the member states has become a tricky business. To say the least, the replacement of the Nation-states by a central European authority has been delayed[10].

7- The "rediscovery" of the distinct nature of Europe rooted in a long prestigious past has proved problematic, given the contrasted, conflictual and pluridimensional course of European history, wherein the best and the worst intertwine. This endeavour is now enmeshed in great difficulties, leading historians to desperately search for a homogeneous, consistent and distinctive European trajectory that, by all accounts, does not seem to exist.

8- It is not obvious that the EU, as a supra-national authority, has been successful in taking over the supposedly old dysfunctional statist political order. For instance, the leaders may have underestimated the deep cleavages that beset the continent, a plight that has been dramatically worsened by an all-out enlargement of the Union over the past twenty years. As a result, Brussells finds itself ensnared in a web of conflicting expectations and claims while its bureaucracy has mushroomed.

9- The three big threats that originally acted as a uniting and mobilizing force have now subsided, if not disappeared. The USSR is dead, the United States is no longer in a situation to dominate and rule Europe, and Germany, even reunified, has become one of the most devoted member state. This leaves the rapidly enlarged EU with a void of powerful symbolic leverage to feed its projected identity, to weather the present economic crisis and to support its future development.

Nations and nationalism as scapegoats

One particularly damaging founding choice lies in the mistrust if not rejection of nations and nationalism. It is not a stretch to say that, to some extent, the EU has been built against the nations (which partly accounts for the lukewarm feeling of ordinary people about the EU). This statement, however, needs clarifications. Actually, what we observe within the Union is a complex, highly unpredictable three-actor play operating at three levels :

1- First, there are the Europeanists or EU elites. Embodying the supra-national dream, they are committed to the reinforcement and the development of the EU, if possible as a federal structure. They include members of the Commission and the Parliament, the EU high-ranking officials, and various intellectuals and researchers (some of them commissioned and many of them financially supported by the EU) dedicated to the advancement of the European project. These elites also include the personnel of the Court of justice, of the European Central Bank and of a few other EU instances.

2- The second group of actors consists of the heads of the member states. Despite forming the very influential European Council (which defines the EU's policy agenda), they should not be confused with the EU elites since they are also directly accountable to their constituencies (upon whom their reelection depend) and, as such, they are entrusted with the defense of their interests. As has been shown by Bickerton (2012), they play a complex double game, being torn between their sometimes conflicting European and national allegiances and responsibilities, although they have learned to often use strategically this otherwise uncomfortable, even contradictory situation.

3- Lastly, the populations of the member states must be dealt with separately, and from two angles. As citizens, they embody the popular sovereignty that is the cornerstone of democratic states and secures their political legitimacy. But they can also be culturally construed as nations, that is, bodies of shared views, identity, memory, myths and traditions that provide the symbolic foundation of a state. It is mostly to this cultural dimension that I am referring to when I say that the EU has been to some extent created and has operated against the nations.

In short, the EU has always harboured a political tension with the member states and a cultural tension with the nations. My analysis focusses on the latter.

There has been, as I have mentioned, a tradition of disparaging discourse on the nations among Europeanists, which has assumed various forms; here are a few examples :

1- Blaming the atrocities of the two world wars on the basically perverted nature of nations and nationalism;

2- Adopting, from the outset, a top-down approach, as a strategy to exclude the untrustworthy nations (or the ordinary people) from the decision-making process;

3- Disseminating a derogatory discourse that pictures nations as basically inward-looking, backward, illiberal, fascist, racist and bellicose, as opposed to the virtuous Union[11]. Such a discourse at the same time invites to build a strictly civic, rational, universal, even cosmopolitan order with a view to restraining national cultures and nationalism, and thus weakening the traditional linkage between nation, sovereignty and states territory;

4- Seeking to build a European people and a European identity relying on a supra-national memory, as a substitute for national cultures and popular sovereignty[12];

5- Attempting to relocate citizenship at the continental level, which has led many analysts to believe that European citizenship is not only about rights but also about power ;
6- Criticizing national identities and myths and, over the past 20-25 years, trying to create competing European counterparts;
7- Attempting to bypass the nations, as well as the states, by speaking directly to cities, regions, minorities, associations and other sub-national entities[13];
8- Celebrating market and economic trans-national interdependance as the new "glue" of the European community.

However, despite being kept at bay by the EU, nations have survived and their marginalization now carries a price. For a long time, the EU has prioritized its rational, utilitarian philosophy. It has also relied on powerful founding myths whose puchase has progressively declined such that the UE is now largely deprived of an emotional mobilizing power still very much alive in the Nations-states. As a result, it can hardly pretend to become a robust political body, let alone a viable federation.

III
BUILDING A EUROPEAN SYMBOLIC FOUNDATION

As already mentioned, EU has been able at its birth to rely on a few powerful myths and ideological choices that have sustained its growth. But for many years, little happened in the symbolic area. In the 1970s, however, a growing concern about a European identity appeared. As for myths *per se*, the topic really picked up steam only in the 1990s. In both cases, the fear of a weakening, if not a collapse of the EU facing new difficulties was the driving factor. The economic crisis of the 1970s was relayed in the 1990s and early 2000s by an uncertainty brought about by the rapid enlargement of the EU (six new members between 1981 and 1995, ten in 2004) and a stagnant popular support.

European Myths : recent proposals…and failures

To make up for the still alive but decreasing purchase of the EU founding myths (specially the repellent symbol of the Shoah and the protection against old external threats), a host of proposals have been set forth with a view to advancing the mythification of various European values and ideals. This has been the case with human rights, freedom, democracy, cultural pluralism, social equality, gender equality, the "green Europe", building a true "European dream" (on the ashes of the American dream), reviving the Christian tradition, mapping out a second Renaissance, prosperity, rationality, spirituality, post-national citizenship, "Unity in diversity" (or "United in diversity"), focusing on a bright future (and escaping the "shameful memory"), universalism, world peace keeping, soft (moral) power, Europe as a shield against globalization or as "the new world laboratory", cosmopolitanism, a "social" Europe, etc.

Studies, however, have shown that for various reasons, few of these attempts has proved really successful as purely *European* myths (as opposed to *national* myths)[14]. Each proposal has its own story, which cannot be recalled here. Let's say that in many cases, the myth was already well grounded at the level of the nations. In other cases (for instance, the motto "Unity in diversity", virtuous foreign policy, spirituality, moral power), the message sounded hollow or smacked of angelism. Likewise, widely criticized for being subservient to neo-liberalism, the EU lacked the credibility to erect itself as a guardian against it and to preach the social gospel.

The search for a European identity

Sparked mostly by the economic crisis, the search for a European identity began, as mentioned, in the 1970s (more precisely with the 1973 Copenhagen declaration) and has since continued unabated. Overall, given the impressive amount of talent and resources that have been brought to bear on this issue, the results, although sophisticated and often innovative, are rather disappointing at the practical level[15]. A brief overview of what has been delivered so far goes like this[16] :

1- A wide array of definitions of identity have been set forth, which is a source of confusion that prevents a synthetic view of the issue and consistent conclusions.
2- There are a lot of theoretical discussions (and disagreement) about the notion of a European identity, generating various incompatible approaches over issues such as : identity versus identification, political legitimity and identity, cultural versus political and civic identity, individual (psychological) or collective (sociological), structural or

dynamic, primordialist or constructivist, thin or "banal" versus substantial ("thick"), European versus national or global…

3- Major questions have also been raised, eliciting a broad array of conflicting responses : Why this concern about identity? Is there a European identity? Should and could there be a European identity? At what point can the link between an individual and the EU be called an identity? Can the depth of an identity be measured? Does it matter to distinguish whether identity (or identification) is only instrumentally motivated (material advantages) rather than affectively? In the latter case, is it based on sympathy or on love? To what extent are national identities the "springboard" instead of the "gravedigger" of EU identity? Can they coexist? What obstructs the construction of a European identity? Should such an identity be planned as a complement or a substitute of national identities? Is Europe experiencing an identity crisis? What should be the place of religion? Is identity a prerequisite for citizenship or the other way around?

4- Many experts have offered a critical examination of the concept itself, often leading to its outright rejection on the grounds that i) it conveys too many, conflicting meanings, ii) it is methodologically flawed, iii) it is basically ideological and manipulative, iv) behaviors and actions matter, not identity, v) societies must do without identities because they are useless, even detrimental and threatening (they alienate, they are groundless, they breed nationalism, xenophobia, exclusion, etc);

5- An overwhelming number of proposals have been set forth as to how a European identity should be built or what it is or should be in terms of distinctive contents. Here is just a sample :
   a) To tap into Europe's ancient intellectual patrimony, which in turn opens to a number of options : Greek origins, Christian tradition, Islam, Renaissance, Enlightenment, modernity…;
   b) To build on the European past, focusing on the rich thread of its unique achievements in culture, economy, law and politics;
   c) To bank on the so-called European values (Europe as a "community of values"), which consist of some or all of the following : peace, universalism, rationality, human rights, democracy, freedom, progress, market economy, equality, justice, tolerance, secularism, humanities, knowledge, and others (the expected overlapping with the quest for myths is obvious here);
   d) To rely on the similarities of national popular cultures --though there is a wide agreement that these cultures are disappearing or have disappeared;
   e) To carve an Habermasian-type of identity focusing on reason, universal contents and civic solidarity;
   f) To promote common "European" traits (sometimes confused with values) : sense of community, mutual support, life styles, critical mindset (reflexivity), uncertainty about one's self…;
   g) To build a territorial imaginary (Europe as a supra-national craddle or "homeland");
   h) To merge particularism and universalism;
   i) To use euro as a powerful unifying identity engine, etc.

6- Various experiments in identity creation (most of them inconclusive and not followed up) have also been carried out : a European television network (Europa TV) and telecommunications policies, common historical textbooks, intercultural initiatives with youths, various festivals, rituals, contests…

Quite expectedly, among such a plethora of disparate and diverging (if not downright contradictory) possibilities, none has reached a dominant status. Of course, nobody knows what the future holds but, as of now, the prevailing diagnosis among most analysts is that either i) there is no and there will never be such thing as ii) European identity or, iii) there is only a weak one, or iv) it is very slowly in the making through people daily interactions and it is not clear what it is going to be in the long run.

IV
A FUTURE FOR EUROPEAN MYTHS :
RECONCILING THE EU WITH THE NATIONS

In the light of what precedes, the quest for a European identity appears to be a highly uncertain endeavor, no longer worthy of major investments. Identity does not easily lend itself to a top-down undertaking at the continental level, as opposed to the micro-level. There must also be an aggreement on what kind of identity to promote and a close connection with a concurring grassroot level development, which is now wanting. However, provided it is reoriented, the search for myths seems promising :

1- While an identity is the by-product of a long, silent, largely auto-driven maturation process, myths are more amenable to cultural initiatives driven by credible social actors;

2- The new European myths do not have to be totally invented. They can rely on pre-existing national myths and even borrow parts of their apparatus;

3- While myths speak only to one or several values, identity engages a whole collective imaginary, hence a much more complex undertaking;

4- If identities need myths, the reverse is not true;

5- The obstacle of cultural heterogeneity is alleviated since the purchase of archetypes cuts across nations, just like the universal values to be promoted.

The construction of European myths have been opposed on the grounds that myths are basically harmful. In my view, they are sacralized values and it is up to a society –and specially to its rulers-- to make sure that these values are well chosen and correctly used. And, by all means, what is wrong with grounding universal values in emotion such that their currency is reinforced? Isn't right to say that one will never like enough freedom, equality and democracy?

The rehabilitation of nations (as well as the people) should start with the recognition that their historical record, just like the whole European past, is made up of a mix of shameful episodes and praiseworthy accomplishments. After all, through powerful social movements, sometimes culminating in upheavals and revolutions, nations have been the cradle of democracy, freedom, civic equality and human rights. As has been shown by many scholars, they have proved to be compatible with liberalism and progressive policies. And in many former colonies, they have provided the framework (and the engine) for the emancipation process, including the end of bondage.

History teaches an important additional lesson. As has been compellingly demonstrated by decades of solid research by the so-called "constructivist" and "modernist" scholars[17], most of the time, the elites rather than the people have built nations and nationalisms, including national myths. Through powerful channels, they have inculcated the national creed among the populations, even imposed it upon them, and then utilized it to pursue their own interests : to buttress and expand capitalism, to set up the modern state, to stifle the growing class consciousness and curb social protest, to wage wars, and so forth. Sometimes, they lost control of nationalism which then got out of hands, but overall, they managed to pull the strings efficiently.

In the same spirit, historians have demonstrated that nationalism unquestionably was a major element in the outbreak and the pursuit of many wars. But they have also shown that :

1- These wars were almost always planned and shepherded by the elites;

2- Many wars were not triggered by nationalism;

3- There are many cases of nationalism without war;

4- Often times, war generates nations and nationalism and not the other way around;

5- In frequent instances, the popular classes opposed and tried to prevent the outbrak of the war[18].

Laying the blame of European horrors on ordinary people and nationalisms comes in handy but it is attacking the wrong target --just as it is to blame ordinary people for the demise of democratic regimes in Interwar Europe[19]. Moreover, this view wrongly assumed that the masses had not drawn the proper lessons of the wars, contrary to the elites.

The point I want to make is that EU founders and subsequent leaders needed a scapogoat. The generation of the EU founders have painted themselves as the virtuous guides dedicated to take the strayed flock back into the right path. They have found in nations and nationalisms a perfect patsy for the two world wars that their predecessors had initiated and conducted, by arousing agressive forms of nationalism fed on animosity and hatred, thus opening the road to the well-known atrocities.

It is noteworthy that the radical hostility towards nations and nationalism prevails mostly in Europe. In other regions of the world, nation and nationalism have proved to be much less harmful and, in many cases, it has been helpful – think of Scandinavia, Australasia, most countries of Latin America, English Canada and Québec. This also holds even for countries or nations of Europe itself such as Switzerland, Ireland, Netherland, Denmark, Scotland or Catalonia. It is therefore unfair to exclusively associate nations and nationalisms with racism, xenophobia and war.

This raises a huge and embarrassing question for Europeans : why is it that on this continent, nations and nationalisms have drifted so tragically in contrast with the way they have played out elsewhere? For all its refinement and great humanist tradition, Europe as a whole has a particularly violent track record at home and abroad. I am not at all denying that nationalism has too ofen been associated with terrible instances of abuse and crimes. Yet, some de-europeanization of the national discourse would come in handy. There is a pressing need to distinguish between hard and

soft and other brands of nationalism, and to look beyond popular classes to understand its real nature and functioning. The focus should be moved from the people to the elites.

The scapegoating strategy has placed the EU founders before a double, difficult challenge : i) to unite the member states while distrusting if not rejecting the nations, and ii) to build and perpetuate a new symbolic foundation beyond and in competition with the old, well entrenched national cultures. On both counts, it was an uphill battle.

VI
AN ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO

In search of new myths, the EU must be able to harness national cultures, this *réservoir* of meanings, beliefs, solidarities, motivations and collective energy, without creating situations of duplication, tension and conflict.

The europeanization of national myths

One can imagine various ways for the EU to capitalize on national cultures without endangering them, in a spirit of symbiosis or hybridization, such that each nation comes to perceive the EU as a flexible framework in which it can express itself and grow in line with its singular trajectory. Here are a few examples :

1- One way could consist in *re-founding*, that is, to make use of the structure of existing national myths (their most universal values, their archetypal foundation, their contextual articulation) and inject them with additional, compatible European contents, thus expanding their currency geographically and socially.
2- According to a second device (*re-cycling*), it would possible to pursue the same goal by reworking the scaffolding of the myth (the anchor, the narrative, the commemorative rituals) in such a way that it carries the same imprint but at a wider scale.
3- *Piggybacking* is another avenue. It consists in crafting a new (EU) myth in contituity or in filliation with an old (national) one in order to partake of and increase its authority.

Other similar devices could be invented and tested, in the same spirit : to carve polysemic European myths that resonate both at the European and national level.

One voice, several echoes

The idea is to build European myths which would be extensions of and in continuity with national cultures so that the latter no longer perceive the EU as a threatening Other. By the same token, grounding universal values on national cultures would bypass the major criticism levelled at the constitutional patriotism model, perceived as too abstract. The overall goal is to invent a true European voice with several national echoes.

Such a proposal would escape criticisms from two opposite directions. On the one hand, it would promote only national myths that are congruent with universal values, thus avoiding a nationalistic threat. On the other hand, by focusing on universal values, it would also prevent the formation of a supra-national perverse brand of nationalism.

CONCLUSION

As stated before, the Union has made a long-lasting contribution to peace and economic development and it certainly deserves to survive and to grow. Yet, the old top-down philosophy inspired by a distrust of and a willingness to sideline the nations has become counter-productive.

One must reckon with a fact : as well entrenched bodies of languages, identities, narratives, solidarities and myths, nations are not likely to disappear soon. Besides, for many people, they are still the first shelter where they can take refuge whenever they feel threatened and where they still have a voice. Instead of confronting them, the EU should find a way to mend fences and join forces with them. If we are to believe the doomsayers, the EU is faced with a dark future and it may well collapse. But nations won't. Brussells should take notice.

What is really threatening is not myths *per se* as much as the agendas and strategies of powerful social actors who build, inculcate, perpetuate and utilize them for their own purposes while deflecting them from their original finality. This is where a collective control should be applied.

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Short bio-note

Historian and sociologist, Gérard Bouchard is professor in Department of Human Sciences at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi. His main domains of interest are collective imaginaries, social and national myths, Québec Quiet Revolution, symbolic foundations of societies and management of ethnocultural diversity.

He is author, co-author, editor or co-editor of 41 works, among which 3 novels, and numerous articles in scientific journals.

He has received several distinctions of which the Literary Award of the Governor General of Canada in 2000 for his book *Genèse des Nations et cultures du Nouveau Monde*, and the Légion d'honneur of France in October 2002. In 2007, with Charles Taylor, he co-chaired the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences (CCAPRCD) established by the government of Québec.

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[1] Defined as sets of collective representations or symbols which members of a society tap into in order to make sense of their life (Swidler 1986).

[2] What follows comes from Bouchard (2014).

[3] More about this in Bouchard (2007, 2014).

[4] For instance : Conrad Adenauer, Alcide de Gasperi, Robert Schuman, Paul-Henri Spaak, Joseph Bech… (Lamberts 1997; Kaiser 2007).

[5] The 1951 Robert Schuman's "Déclaration", inspired by Jean Monnet, was very clear on that score : "la fusion des intérêts indispensables à l'établissement d'une communauté économique (…) introduit le ferment d'une communauté plus large et plus profonde…" (see Ouraoui 2008, 154).

[6] The Belgium statesman Paul-Henri Spaak once said that Stalin was the father of the EU.

[7] One must make room for the thesis advanced by Milward (1992), that the first member states were motivated by the benefits that they could derive from the Union.

[8] Given the limits of qualitative analysis as regards causality (it allows no measurement), my goal is only to establish that the symbolic sphere was a contributing factor among others. I have no way to demonstrate a formal causality.

[9] I am relying here on Galland and Roudet 2005, Hooghe and Marks 2005, Judt 2006, Sonntag 2011, 123.

[10] Over the last decades, Nation-states have proliferated across the world. The United Nations is now comprised of 193 members (51 in 1945).

[11] This, for instance, clearly comes through in the interviews made by Shore (2000) with a sample of EU civil servants. It is also consistent with my own numerous exchanges with EU officers a few years ago.

[12] "There will be no peace in Europe if the states re-establish themselves on the basis of national sovereignty" (Jean Monnet, in a 1943 memorandum quoted in its *Memoirs*, 1978, 222).

[13] This echoes a motto crafted, again, by Jean Monnet : "Nous ne coalisons pas des États, nous unissons des hommes."

[14] See, for instance, the January 2010 thematic issue (vol. 48, no 1) of the *Journal of Common Market Studies* ("Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union").

[15] Other scholars have offered a much more pungent appraisal of this scientific thread (for instance : Favell 2005).

[16] Again, the scholarship in this field is rich and massive. My research, therefore, does not pretend to be exhaustive. But I have looked at a huge part of it. Besides, I will not comment on the theoretical and methodological value of each proposal. My goal is only to provide a glimpse of the directions taken by this strain of research and of its practical outcomes.

[17] Such as E. J. Hobsbawm, E. Gellner, A. Giddens, B. Anderson and others.

[18] Again, I am relying here on a solid thread of scholarship establishing the linkage between elites, nationalism and war (C. Tilly, B. Bond, M. Harries, S. Harries, D. Conversi, M. Mann, etc.).

[19] As has been demonstrated by Bermeo (2003). According to her thesis, elites, not the people, were responsible for the major democratic breakdowns in the Western world between 1920 and 1938.